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TAGS: [FAIR](#) [PGOV](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: CIVAIR COMMUNITY EAGERLY AWAITS NEW GPS PROCEDURE

1. Summary. Global Positioning System (GPS) procedures for Quito's Mariscal Sucre airport are close to becoming a reality. GOE civil aviation regulators, the airlines, and the Quito Airport all see positive benefits to introducing GPS procedures. Benefits include preventing frequent weather-related diversions, facilitating the airport's transition to 24-hour operation, and rehabilitating the airport's reputation. Although local regulators see the introduction of GPS as a foot up in their effort to regain Category 1 status, the connection between the two is essentially non-existent. End Summary.

ON THE CUSP OF GPS

2. Triggered by a \$300,000 investment by an American carrier, the regulatory process necessary for implementing a GPS procedure at Quito's Mariscal Sucre airport is nearing its end. Drawing on available, on-board technology, pilots would utilize GPS procedures to help them land aircraft when weather-related conditions limit line-of-sight capacity. Ecuador's Direccion General de Aviacion Civil (DGAC), which has regulatory oversight on the matter, has agreed in principle to implementing the GPS procedure. The DGAC currently is awaiting a technical review by FAA to give carriers and the Quito Airport the green light. FAA has completed the review and is preparing an official, positive response to the DGAC. A parallel regulatory process between American carriers and the FAA also is nearing completion.

GPS A POTENTIAL SAVIOR

3. A number of GPS-derived benefits drive interest in the procedure. Most importantly, an approved GPS procedure would allow airplanes to land at Quito's main airport under disruptive weather conditions. For years, shifting winds, heavy fog and other weather-related problems have diverted incoming air traffic to Guayaquil, neighboring Colombia or Panama. Passenger traffic -- some 80 flights per year are diverted -- has garnered a majority of the attention, but cargo flights are also affected. The diversions disrupt passenger itineraries and generate fuel and passenger accommodation costs for the airlines.

4. GPS procedures also would allow authorities to expand airport operations to 24-hours. While a shift to around-the-clock operations does not directly influence passenger schedules, cargo carriers will benefit. Profiting the most is Ecuador's floral industry, which relies on timely shipments for its cut flower exports.

5. A less tangible benefit of the GPS procedure is one of status. In discussions with EconOff, DGAC Director William Birkett frequently has expressed concern about the airport's reputation, which is negatively affected by both weather-related diversions and limited operation schedules. A GPS procedure addresses both concerns while also allowing airlines to utilize the newest available technology. With slight adjustments, these GPS procedures also could be used at the new Quito airport, scheduled to open in 2009. Birkett believes that the GPS procedure, by helping reduce uncertainty, also will have a positive spillover effect on investment across Ecuador's economy.

INTEREST IN CATEGORY ONE CERTIFICATION PERSISTS

6. Less certain is any positive impact the implementation of a GPS system would have on the GOE's efforts to regain Category 1 certification of its safety oversight system. Ecuador lost Category 1 status in 1994 and with it the right for Ecuadorian airlines to fly directly to the U.S. and to maintain beneficial code-sharing relationships with American carriers. The first step toward regaining Category 1 is the passage of an adequate Civil Aviation Law, which currently is up for a second debate in Congress. Despite FAA review of draft legislation based on FAA standards, over the past year special interests have watered down language in the proposed law.

7. Meanwhile, inspections last year by the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) of safety protocols at Quito and

Guayaquil airport revealed no substantial security violations. Despite the positive nature of the inspections, the FAA notes that regaining Category 1 would still require a formal technical review of airport safety once an adequate Civil Aviation Law is passed. Birkett, who is working with a timetable that ends in December 2006, has expressed frustration over the need for a technical review. In turn, he has suggested that productive steps forward on matters such as GPS procedures should suffice toward satisfying further Category 1 concerns.

COMMENT

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18. Regaining Category 1 status appears to be a top priority for Birkett, a former Air Force General and former President of the Ecuadorian military-owned airline TAME. He takes the status of civil aviation in Ecuador personally. Unfortunately, his belief that progress on GPS can facilitate the Category 1 process is misguided. However, Birkett seems to have brought a new sense of purpose to the DGAC and cooperation with the Civil Aviation Commission has been much improved. Still, despite Birkett's productive work, the GOE's legitimacy on civil aviation is hampered by its previous lackluster effort to help Category 1 legislation pass, even as the USG expended a lot of energy toward that end.

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